

Old notebooks and a shaky memory! : Bryan Stone enjoys some summer holiday nostalgia

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal**

Band (Jahr): - **(2016)**

Heft 126

PDF erstellt am: **21.06.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854043>

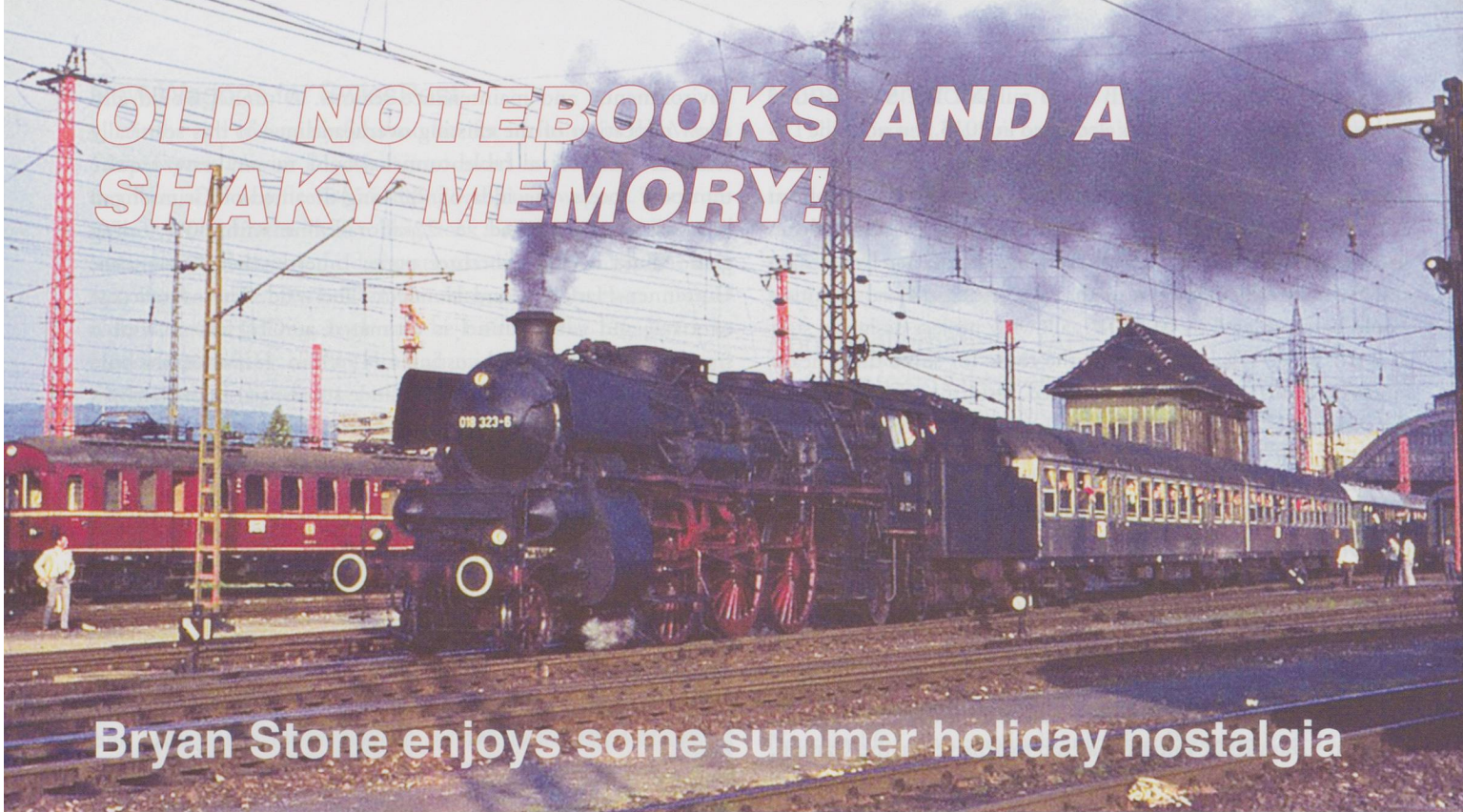
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OLD NOTEBOOKS AND A SHAKY MEMORY!



Bryan Stone enjoys some summer holiday nostalgia

DB 018 No.323 at Basel Bad.

All photos: Bryan Stone

Old notebooks and a shaky memory were recently challenged when I was scanning-in some of my old slides. These have mostly kept well (the oldest date from the 1960s) and a new Canon Scanner allows some wonders of regeneration. Most so far treated were in Switzerland, Germany, France and Italy, in the period 1965 to 1980. In 1968 when working for BR I, together with my young family who joined me in 1969, was offered a move to Basel to become involved in the developing area of international rail container freight. This meant that travel, both professional and private, was wide and frequent. A love of trains, especially in Switzerland, was a bonus. This is not a diary or a travelogue, but a window, I hope, upon those early years. That it was totally different to today is clear

to all. Let's look at the rail world of that time, first the wider scene, and then in the Switzerland that became our new home.

Perhaps the most surprising was what we actually did; for journeys were longer, and since we did not fly, we were creative, and perhaps tough. Meetings in Denmark, for example, required a sleeper to Hamburg, and a morning train via Puttgarden, to arrive late afternoon. Work was evening and next day, and then came the return journey. But there was more leisure than today; aside from my work I would visit a museum, even a concert, watch trains, or have supper before taking a sleeper home again. It was perfectly possible to run business affairs using the European network of long-distance and night trains, the through cars and sleepers, and I ran

up huge distances. A night in a blue Wagon-Lits car was always a delight, Orient Express atmosphere even on a humdrum Basel – Brussels trip. They were beautifully turned out, discreetly supervised and rode well, mostly superbly. An exception was the 'Night Ferry', Paris – London, which I tried a few times: run-down and unreliable. Germany had its own red sleepers, and they too were good, whilst

230B No.862, an Est 4-6-0 compound which had received – surely as a joke – the smoke deflectors of a huge 241A, at Delle on the daily Bern-Paris Est in 1965.



lacking the style. A regular trip for me was Hamburg and back on successive nights, and that took some stamina. But there was no jet lag, which I got to know later. Couchettes, mainly in France on the Calais run, were rather more demanding, but as a family of four we could have a First to ourselves (four berths), and with the help of a small gratuity the door would stay locked all night. My young daughters loved such treats, with a sea trip thrown in. Winter trips could be seriously unpredictable; we had several at least 4 hours delays, so the airlines have nothing new.

There were two familiar trips, mainly for family reasons. The first was Basel – Calais Maritime – London Victoria, train CB/BC or later No.396, using the 1st. Class SNCF couchette car running between Calais – Milano. The second was Basel – Hoek van Holland – Harwich – London, using the TEE ‘*Rheingold*’ or D-Zug ‘*Lorelei*’ with a night in a ship’s cabin. I made, in some 20 years, over 500 short sea crossings. The 1969 memories include SNCF’s Class 141Rs stamping out of Calais Mme. at 20.00, and huge night trains of 15 to 18 cars, sometimes doubled-up in the ski season, for this was the time of school and all-in party travel. You will, of course, search in vain today for such trains, or indeed the Maritime stations; with Eurostar and the new terminals their time is long past. Even night trains are rare things. High speed was already intervening. The first ICEs meant I could leave Hamburg (800 km away) at 16.30 and be home by bedtime. With the ICEs we no longer took the old line through Bebra, along the River Werra, where the intimidating border fortifications of the DDR (the Russian Zone of Germany) were only a stone’s throw away. But at Bebra shed you could find the Class 01.0500 Pacifics of the DR, and one of these also came several times to Hamburg on an inter-zonal train from Dresden. Where these once ran, the DB’s ICE-network now demonstrates national unity. Just as I write (January 2016) I learn that the DB’s last sleeper services will end this coming December.

Into the mid-70s in Germany or Italy there was still steam, and a seat at the window (and ready camera) could be rewarding allowing me to bring home many pictures, curiosities today. If Germany meant mostly Class 50 2-10-0s, Italy was alive with Class 625s, 740s, or 835s engines, as on a happy afternoon in Trieste watching 0-6-0T 835 040 shunting the station. One summer evening, I found an hour at Brescia to visit the shed, full of Crosti-boilered 2-8-0s still then used on the Cremona line. All the engines were fascinating; there were still many electric veterans around, and a half-hour at the platform

end could be like a short course in electrical history. But let us come back to Switzerland. Even here, it was a wonderful world. Starting with the DB, 1969 saw Haltingen yards shunted for the last time by Prussian G10 0-10-0s. There were Class 50s at Waldshut, and at Radolfzell Class 44s, 50s & 94s. The last Baden State Class 75 2-6-2Ts banked German freights out of Schaffhausen. But one day we had a bonus. I find that on 13th July 1969 I took the 04.38 Basel Bad. to Karlsruhe, to join a special at 07.18 to Offenburg, over the Black Forest Line to Radolfzell, and back via Schaffhausen and Basel Bad. to Karlsruhe. The attraction was No.18.323, the last Baden State class IVh Pacific, a legendary giant built in 1920, and retained by the DB Research centre in Minden. Though the Black Forest Line never called for such race horses, the section Basel – Mannheim had once been her home on the original ‘*Rheingold*’, and I rode behind her and saw her for a last time here on my doorstep. There were other trips. For example we were in time, in mid-1969, to ride the last trains on the Singen - Etwilen line of the former Swiss National Railway (SNB) often described in SE. That reminds me that at that time, long before the Taktfahrplan, the timetable came out twice yearly, summer and winter, one book with trains, national and international, sleepers and restaurant cars, and all Postal Buses, in a form weighing 20 % of today’s three volumes (which ignore international services anyway!).

Holidays with the family were in Berner Oberland or Graubünden. I find a note that on the Brienzer Rothorn Bahn on a good day, locomotives Nos.1,2,3,4,5 and 7 all left in convoy on a late morning departure; previously No. 6 had taken the 10.19. There were no reserves; all were up the mountain. Today Nos.3 and 4 have been stored for many years out of use, but who thought we would have four new engines built in 1996? Although SBB steam finished in 1968, there were still a number of industrial and private (often ex-SBB) locomotives in regular use. Emmenbrücke, Chippis, Choindez, Reuchenette, Winterthur, Domat-Ems and others could all reward a searching look. The Blonay-Chamby Museum Railway opened in 1968, and we soon found it. Most Swiss main lines



DB 01 No.0527 at Hamburg Altona.




were run with Ae4/7s, Re4/4 Is or new Re4/4 IIs. The new RBe4/4 railcars had a short 'express' life and a long reign on suburban trains, but they are now all gone. Some unusual routes existed, like Brig – Bern – Delémont – Basel, reflections of the BLS's earliest years and the focus on Delle. The BLS still had its grandiose Ae6/8s in regular service. Other trains ran from Genève through Olten to Basel, also unheard of today. The SBB still had many rod-drive engines, and I can still seem to hear that ring and grinding as an Ae3/6 or Be 4/6 set off on a Jura local train. Classics of the time were still the Crocodiles, never really numerous but, although off regular Gotthard work by 1969, seemingly always around. Olten and Zürich were good places to look. We discovered the Swiss metre-gauge, much of it still active today. The newest engines of the Rhätische Bahn were the Class 700s, but we looked out for the veteran prototypes then 60 years old, and their Crocodiles. The RhB hauled a lot of freight too. SBB was always short of power meaning the use of veterans was still very necessary. The Jura was home to some of the 1920s prototype series locos, and the pre-Autobahn car shuttle at Göschenen still kept some Ae3/5s busy, until the

1. No.231K8 at Calais Maritime.
2. No.141R179 at Calais Maritime.
3. SBB Rheingold 103 1No.54 at Basel.
4. A Rheingold destination board.
5. No.11253 TEE at Brig.
6. 4010 02 Transalpin at Basel.



road tunnel opened in 1982.

One of my scanned images set me thinking. The 17th of February 1969 was the day, when I had returned to Britain to escort my family on their move from Doncaster to Basel. We took the Harwich route and the 'Lorelei' express from Hoek Van Holland via Köln. A DSG restaurant car waited with breakfast. My pictures en route show deep snow, which we all apparently enjoyed; after all, we were off to live in Switzerland. We never gave a thought to the possibility that we might not reach Basel that night. My notebook doesn't even mention it. Were we really so naive, or were we simply satisfied, in those days, to be in safe hands? I think it was the latter. There was so much more, but today, 47 years later, I still love a train ride. The hourly IC to Interlaken Ost never palls. An ICN trip or the TGV to Paris, or an HST to the West of England from Paddington, for example, are an experience. Some are simply good but utilitarian, such as the ICEs in Germany. Some are still rustic, as in my beloved Jura. Some tempt fate, as in Italy. But Swiss trains are more than a ride; although changed beyond recognition, they are, as readers know, a way of life. 

- 7. RAm 502 TEE at Bruxelles Midi in 1972.
- 8. No. 636 at Milano Central with BLS stock for Zug.
- 9. No 13256 at Stein-Säckingen.
- 10. No.13302 & No. 10986 at Olten.
- 11. Coaches at Lille.
- 12. CIWL sleeper at Brig.

